

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) does not collect demographic information relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. Consequently, community colleges do not have an accurate picture of their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) student population. The challenges LGBT people face off-campus have been researched and identified, and include a heightened risk of homelessness, disparate health and mental health outcomes, inequities of employment and income, and disproportionately high risk of being the targets of violence and other bias-motivated incidents (“Injustice at Every Turn”). These challenges have also been identified in the K-12 public school environment (“Safe at School”). It is reasonable to suppose that these risks follow LGBT students throughout their educational careers and affect their college enrollment, retention and completion rates; but without accurate demographic information, college administrators must rely on anecdotal evidence to develop programs and services that target LGBT students, and can only guess at the success of these efforts.

To address this issue, thereby enabling college administrations to have an informed discussion of the needs of their LGBT students, the Washington State legislature should:

1. Begin to collect demographic data for LGBT students in the community and technical college system, via the modification of the “Uniform Application for Admission to Washington Community and Technical Colleges”. (Like other demographic information, reporting this information would be voluntary, leaving it to the discretion of students whether or not they feel it is safe or necessary to identify themselves to the institution as LGBT.)
2. Use this demographic information to track the performance of LGBT cohorts, looking for equity of educational outcomes and addressing inequities when they are identified. In this way the State will be held accountable for its commitment to provide equal access and educational opportunities to all people.